

The So-la Bird

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So-la lived in a tree. She was light green and rosy pink and had a long, slim tail. She loved her slender tail. Her beak was long and slender too. She ate bugs and sipped nectar and that was the life for her.

“So-la! So-la!” she sang in the morning. “So-la! So-la!” she sang to greet the sun and call it out of hiding.

And every morning the sun listened to her song and rose into the air to light the sky. Then So-la rose into the air too and sang some more: “So-la! So-la! So-la-tee! ... So-la! So-la! So-la-tee!” That is what she sang when she flew up in the morning and the sun gazed upon her with shining eyes. After that she went about her business of eating bugs and sipping sweet nectar and living the life that was for her.

At night she put the sun to bed. She sat on the highest branch and sang the sun into setting. “Teeee-la,” she cried softly, “Teeee-la.” And the sun, always and always, laid his head upon the earth and closed his eyes. That is how So-la put the sun to bed. Then she slept with her head under her wing.

On day So-la was sipping nectar. She dipped her long and slender beak into the long and slender flower and drank. It was sweet and perfumed.

“So-la! So-la! Come here. It’s Maori. Come!”

So-la looked down. A boy was standing on the forest floor looking up at her. She had never seen him before. How did he know her name?

“So-la! So-la! Come, come,” called Maori, and So-la went. She opened her wings and went. She never knew why.

Maori carried her on his shoulder. He carried her through the forest and onto the plain where the grass rustled in the wind. All day he carried her, and when the sun began to rest

his head she flew into the sky, and cried, "Teeee-la. Teeee-la," until the sun set. Maori made a fire and sat into the night while So-la tucked her head under her wing and slept.

"So-la! So-la! So-la-tee!" called So-la in the morning mist.

The sun rose and Maori rose and soon they were on their way. O, the grasses were long and brown and the trees far and few. The wind blew warm and dry and always Maori walked. He walked into the sun in the morning; he turned his back on the sun in the evening; he watched So-la put the sun to bed at night.

For three days Maori covered the plains with his footsteps until at last they arrived at the sipping wells. Maori sipped and So-la drank of the flowers that grew about. The sipping wells were an island of green in a sea of grasses dead and brown. No one was there but Maori's sister and she lay upon her bed.

"Taruna, Taruna, my heart, I brought the bird of your dreams. So-la is come."

Taruna stirred. She turned her head and opened her eyes. She was young, but her eyes were dim. So-la saw the sun setting in her grass-brown eyes, and even though the day was bright she sang, "Teeee-la. Teeee-la. Teeee-la."

Taruna closed her eyes and smiled.

"Teeee-la. Teeee-la. Teeee-la," sang So-la, and Taruna smiled.

Maori sat under the spreading tree. The tears from his eyes made streaks in the dust on his face.

So-la sat in the branches. She watched the sun. He moved towards his resting, and as he lay his head upon the earth, up So-la sprang and sang her morning song: "So-la! So-la! So-la-tee! ... So-la! So-la! So-la-tee!" Over and over she sang her morning song as the sun lay down his shining head and the shadows grew long on the land. On she sang, over and over, until a light kindled in the hut where Taurua lay. The light was bright and left the hut and flew to the sun as he lay down his head.

And when the sun had closed his eyes So-la fell to the ground. She lay on the grassy plain at Maori's bare brown feet until he took her into his hand by the light of the sickle moon.

"So-la! So-la! Where have you gone?" he cried. He knew, but still he cried: "So-la! So-la! Where have you gone?"

So-la had flown and didn't come back, but Taruna rose in the morning and sang to the sun and ran on the wild grassy plains where the wind was forever blowing.